

12 February 2019

129th Legislature

LD 292/ HP 216: An Act To Feed Maine's Residents by Allowing Dairy Dealers and Producers in the State To Donate Fresh Milk to Food Banks in the State

Senator Dill, Representative Hickman, and Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

As a Dairy Farmer here in Maine one of the most meaningful and important rewards is knowing that the food our farm and cows produce is on the tables of our neighbours. One of the saddest and most frustrating aspects is knowing that the sustainable nutrition that milk from our cows offers is NOT on the tables who need it most.

Hunger and food insecurity in Maine is a startling and sobering statistic: 1 in 7 Mainers struggle with hunger and 1 in 5 children are not certain of their next meal.* The incredibly important work done by Good Shepherd Food Bank is integral to making sure that ALL Mainers have access to good food on their tables.

That being said, I have to oppose LD 292, AS WRITTEN, as an exemption of the Maine Milk Commission's minimum price requirements would risk the further weakening of our agricultural and rural communities, place our dairy farmers at peril, and erode the integral foundation of our rural economies.

My opposition to the bill is not to its purpose of premise (feeding people who need it most) but in the method which has been proposed. Instead of simply opposing this proposal I offer the examples of frameworks and the flexibility that exists therein to find the solutions needed. The fact is, that if the problem is getting food into the bellies of the hungry then the dairy community is not only up to the task but the right place to turn to for a solution.

Nationally, in my experience with various and multiple organizations that place a high priority on eliminating and decreasing food insecurity the cooperation of multiple entities across sectors has proven to be successful and productive.

There are multiple examples of milk purchase models between dairy organizations, (like The Dairy Alliance), processors (like Windcrest Dairy Farms, Maola, Kroger), and food pantries (like God's Pantry- a food bank in Kentucky that serves 120 counties in KY, IN, and OH; Virginia Federation of Food Banks-which covers VA; Gleaners Food Bank) that have proven that local, fresh, high quality milk from our local dairy farms CAN set the

table for those in need through purchasing. Initiatives such as the Great American Milk Drive (<https://milklife.com/give/donate>) provide the framework and flexibility for donations to be impactful for this very purpose in local areas.

While I cannot support this exemption to our very important Maine Milk Commission's minimum price requirements I can support and will gladly work to help find a solution that ensures that our neighbours have good food from Maine dairy farms on their table, and I know that I am not alone: the dairy farmers of Maine want to be a part of this solution.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and this important work.

Sincerely,

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* <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine>